

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL 4x9

About, about, in ghostly rout
They trod a saraband:
And the damned grotesques made
nrahesques,
Like the wind upon the sand!
With the pirouettes of marionettes,
They tripped on pointed tread:
But with flutes of Fear they filled
the car,
As their grisly masque they
led,
And loud they sang, and long
the3^r s[^]-n^g?
For they sang to wake the dead.
*"Oho / " they cried, " The world is wide,
But fettered limbs go lame I
A.nd once, or twice, to throw the dice
Is a gentlemanly game;
But he does not win who plays with Sin
In the secret House of Shame"*
No things of air these antics were,
That frolicked with such
glee:
To men whose lives were held
in gyves
And whose feet might not go free.,
Ah 1 wounds of Christ I they were living
things,
Most terrible to see.
Around, around, they waltzed and
wound;
Some wheeled in smirking pairs;
With the mincing step of a demirep
Some sidled up the stairs:
And with subtle sneer, and fawning leer,
Each helped us at our prayers.
The morning wind began to moan,
But still the night went on:
Through its giant loom the web of gloom
Crept till each thread was spun:
And, as we prayed, we grew afraid
Of the Justice of the Sun,
The moaning wind went wandering
round
The weeping prison-wall:
Till like a wheel of turning steel
We felt the minutes crawl:
O moaning wind I what had we done
To have such a seneschal?